



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord

God became man that man might become God

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 1: 17-23, Matthew 28:16-20

For fifteen years, in my last parish, we lived opposite a small newsagent's shop on the busy High road out of Watford. We became good friends with the young Indian couple running it. We watched as they worked tirelessly to build up their business, rejoiced with them as they had their children and were delighted for them when opportunity arose for them to sell and move to more profitable work with more family time. Shortly after they moved out, we came home to Cornwall and have not seen them for a dozen years.

Imagine then our astonishment and emotion when a card landed on our doormat inviting us to their son's wedding at the Jain Temple in Hertfordshire.

I telephoned and a familiar voice answered. 'Yes', we were wanted as old friends and guests of honour from the Christian Church. I explained that I could take no part in the rituals of another faith. They fully understood. No such thing would be asked just that we come and celebrate with them.

Several weeks and 300 miles later we pitched up at the Jain Temple.

The menfolk were dressed in suits of shimmering elegance and regal dignity – unlike Western men whose garb is a tribute to the drabness of modernity. The women, in their saris, were the epitome of femininity, grace and flowing beauty – a stark contrast to the inadequate, distended spandex numbers that all too often mark our own wedding outfits.

The tiny and beautiful bride gracefully glided up the aisle under the weight of glittering metalwork and brocade that existed, I thought, only in fairy tales.

The groom, once he had undergone the ritual struggle with his mother-in-law (an utterly realistic metaphor best dealt with at this stage) processed in like a sultan.

For nearly three hours the priest carefully instructed the participants and all of us in the intricacies of the rituals and prayers and commitments being undertaken.

We tried to sit near the back but were ushered into the very front row family seats.

When the priest invited us to pray to the source of all life, the sun, we dutifully prayed to the source of all life, the Son.

And then it happened....The priest told a story of when he was a little boy. His father was a priest and he asked his dad if he would show him God. In response his father took the boy to a wedding. He pointed to the groom. That, he told him, is God. Then he pointed to the bride. That is the Goddess. Here before us, the priest told us, were god and goddess.

Of course, as Christians, we believe none of that.

Fond as we might be of young Kyush, we'd be mad to think of him as god.

Beautiful as Eysha is we cannot think of her as a goddess.

Then two things dawned on me.

One: In *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II document on other religions, we are encouraged to reject nothing of what is true and holy in these religions while continuing to understand and proclaim that the totality of truth is to be found only in Jesus Christ.

Parts of the truth may be revealed in other places. What man has partly discovered elsewhere has been fully and finally revealed in Jesus.

So, for Christians, let us remind ourselves, a marriage is but a reflection of that deeper wedding betwixt Christ and His Church.

This divine-human relationship is the essence of the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

Second, and you will be relieved to know that this is where the Ascension comes in, the humanisation of God in Christ is also the key to the divinisation of Man in the same Jesus Christ Our Lord.

We are not 'gods' and 'goddesses' BUT....we are made in the image of God.

In the sacramental life of the Church our humanity is constantly invited into the divine life and the divine life is constantly invited into our humanity.

When Christ instructs us to be 'holy' as God Himself is holy it is, humanly speaking, impossible. It is only possible because He has died to wash away our sins with His blood and, in the Ascension, translated our redeemed humanity into the holiness and eternity of God.

The Church's task is to be the human body of Christ on earth, to incarnate the Risen One. Christ's work has been to take on and purge our fallen humanity and deify it.

The bastion of Orthodoxy, St. Athanasius wrote, 'God became man that man might become God.'

At our young friend's wedding we heard the history of part of Man's journey to that amazing truth. It can only find fulfilment in the Ascension of Christ.

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